



[N.J. politics has a ‘toxic culture’ of sexual harassment. Here are 5 ways to fix it, landmark report says.](#)

After spending a year listening to women’s [#MeToo stories about being sexually harassed](#), assaulted and marginalized in New Jersey politics, a committee of top female politicians and lobbyists released [a report](#) Thursday calling for the creation of an independent investigative unit to handle complaints involving political campaigns and government.

The new investigative team would be overseen by the nonpartisan Election Law Enforcement Commission, the respected state agency that polices campaign finance laws. The commission, better known as ELEC, would allow victims to bypass campaign and party officials to file complaints about sexual harassment, bullying or discrimination in state and local politics, the report said.

The creation of the new investigative unit is one of five recommendations to help change the “toxic culture” in New Jersey politics and government outlined in the 76-page report by the [Workgroup on Harassment, Sexual Assault and Misogyny in New Jersey Politics](#).

“For women in New Jersey, putting up with groping, unwanted propositions — even sexual assault — was the entry price for participation and advancement in the world of government and politics,” the report concluded.

The 15-member workgroup — which includes Lt. Gov. Sheila Oliver and other top female politicians, lobbyists and state officials — was created by state Senate Majority Leader [Loretta Weinberg](#). The veteran lawmaker quickly put together the group days after a December 2019 NJ Advance Media investigation [published on NJ.com and in The Star-Ledger revealed widespread sexual harassment and misogyny](#) in state politics and government.

The NJ Advance Media story “brought us together as an ad hoc workgroup to seek ways to address the issues they raised — issues so many of us already knew all too well,” the report said.

The proposed ELEC investigative team would bypass the state’s “male-dominated political power structure” to create a new place for women to turn to if they are harassed or assaulted, the recommendations said. Complaints could be made against anyone ELEC regulates, including elected officials, campaign operatives and lobbyists. Any criminal findings would be turned over to law enforcement.

Legislation creating the new unit in ELEC, which comes with a \$2 million price tag, would have to be approved by the state Legislature and signed by Gov. Phil Murphy.

The workgroup’s other recommendations include:

- Requiring state, county and local political parties to post and enforce a sexual harassment policy. Violators would face sanctions, which may include denying candidates financial support and refusing to allow them to appear on the election ballot representing the party.

- Mandating sexual harassment training for everyone who runs for elective office, as well as party officials, consultants and volunteers.

- Prohibiting non-disclosure agreements and mandatory arbitration clauses in campaigns or other devices “designed to silence” people who bring sexual harassment complaints. This would strengthen the law Gov. Phil Murphy signed in 2019 that bans non-disclosure agreements in the state.

- Ensuring the New Jersey League of Municipalities and the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce follow the new rules they’ve established to make the state’s biggest political events — the league’s annual convention and after-parties in Atlantic City and the annual “Chamber Train” trip — safer for women. The chamber barred hard liquor from being served on the Amtrak train to Washington, D.C., last year and created a phone line to report sexual harassment complaints in response to the 2019 NJ Advance Media story detailing years of groping and sexual comments aimed at women on the trip.

The workgroup’s report, which was released during a video meeting Thursday afternoon, also included an endorsement for a series of bills introduced last month that would improve sexual assault investigations and strengthen the state Legislature sexual harassment law.

The package, with Weinberg as a lead sponsor, [passed the full Senate last month](#).

The bills include the creation of a restorative justice program that would enable victims to resolve their cases outside of law enforcement and the courts. Another bill would require county prosecutors to notify victims whether charges will be filed in a rape case.

All of the bills await action in the state Assembly.

Most of the legislation is based on recommendations from Katie Brennan, chief of staff to the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, who alleged she was raped by a senior adviser to Gov. Phil Murphy's campaign when she was a volunteer in 2017. The alleged assailant was investigated twice and never charged with a crime, though [Brennan settled a \\$1 million lawsuit](#) against the state and the Murphy campaign last year.

Brennan was one of dozens of people who testified before the Workgroup on Harassment, Sexual Assault and Misogyny in New Jersey Politics in a series of public and private hearings over the last year. The first few hearings were in person, before moving to online Zoom meetings after the start of the pandemic. Some sessions were not open to the public to allow people to testify confidentially.

Those who testified included political candidates, party leaders, union officials, state workers, [inmates from the state women's prison](#) and others tied to state and local government. The women, and a few men, shared their experiences with sexual harassment, assault, retaliation and the difficulties of reporting sexual misconduct.

Weinberg said she deliberately created the all-female workgroup outside of state government to avoid the influence of the male-led state government.

"We wanted to create a 'firewall' between the panel and the state's male-dominated political power structure to assure women that we would truly be independent, that their voices would be heard, and that their confidentiality would be respected," Weinberg said in the report.

The Star-Ledger/NJ.com investigation in December 2019 featured the accounts of more than 20 women who had been sexually assaulted and harassed in state politics but declined to report their mistreatment to authorities because most said they feared it would jeopardize their careers and they would not be believed.

[An online survey led by the New Jersey Coalition for Sexual Assault](#) released last summer in conjunction with the workgroup's activities found 64% of the 505 women who participated said they had experienced harassment. The survey found the most common types of harassment cited were "verbal remarks of a sexual nature" (23%), followed by "sexist or misogynistic

comments” (22%) and “unwanted touching” (15%). About 3% of those responding to the survey said they had been raped or sexually assaulted.

The workgroup’s report featured highlights from the testimony of women who spoke to the committee in public hearings and behind closed doors.

Liz Foley, director of online content for the grassroots political committee Action Together New Jersey, testified about her experiences dealing with county party chairmen whose misogyny short-circuited the political careers of young women aspiring to be involved in politics.

“As someone who is new to New Jersey, I really do want to be clear that this sort of toxic atmosphere exists in a lot of places. But it’s real special in New Jersey,” Foley said, alleging women entering politics through county political committees are regularly bullied into submission.

“They took their seats and they were immediately ordered how to vote, told what to think and not to ask questions, told that if they did anything, stepped out of line, they would be removed from the committee,” Foley said.

Sabeen Masih, a young lobbyist who is also a member of the workgroup, spoke about what it is like for young women to try to navigate New Jersey politics, said she and her colleagues take “defensive steps” to protect themselves.

“We create group texts to check in with our colleagues at conventions and conferences. We never walk alone or accept drinks from anyone but ourselves. Our guard is constantly up and we have to evaluate if one more event, one more connection, one more part of our night is worth walking into the unknown,” Masih said.

Amanda Richardson, the 35-year-old Harding Township Democratic chair, was among the first to testify before the workgroup publicly. She described the unwanted touching and sexual comments from male colleagues at political events and on social media.

“I received texts and Facebook messages that implied or outright suggested sex, and I read texts, Facebook messages, Snapchats and emails to other women that were worse than I had received. I was propositioned and groped at the League of Municipalities convention,” Richardson said.

Another female politician, who also asked the workgroup not to publicly identify her, testified about her male running mate in a legislative race publicly insulted her intelligence and would put his arm around her against her will. When she complained to party leaders, she said she was

told she was overreacting and should apologize to him for objecting because he raised more money for the campaign than she did.

“I wonder for how long or how much we are expected to remain silent,” she said in her testimony, adding that if political parties want young women and women of color to run for office they need to do a better job vetting who is part of campaigns.

The workgroup kept its report and recommendations confidential until Thursday afternoon. It’s not clear whether the recommendations, which will soon be introduced as legislation, will pass the state Legislature and ultimately be signed into law.

The sexual assault victims bills won unanimous support in the Senate in December.

Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, D-Middlesex, praised the workgroup efforts and said he will consider the legislation once it is introduced.

“I commend the tireless and critically important work of Senator Leader Weinberg and the panel the Majority Leader convened,” Coughlin said. “I am committed to ensuring a safe, inclusive and tolerant work environment for everyone. There is no place in politics, or anywhere else, for misogyny, harassment or discrimination.”

Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-Gloucester, also said he give the recommendations his attention.

“Loretta has been a longtime champion on issues of gender violence and workplace equity and I am hopeful her work with this committee will improve the environment for everyone in and around the Statehouse,” Sweeney said.

The workgroup hinted in its report that it does not intend for its recommendations for changes in New Jersey to die in Trenton without a vote. The report cited a similar effort by female lawmakers in Illinois who created a committee to propose bipartisan sexual harassment reforms in 2018 after a series of #MeToo allegations in the state government.

The Illinois legislation was stalled by the male state Senate speaker who refused to bring it up for a vote.

“It was an objective lesson that the Workgroup wants to make sure is not repeated in New Jersey,” the report said.

The recommendations for reforms in how sexual harassment allegations are handled in political campaigns comes as Murphy is launching his reelection campaign.

Criticized for failing to police misogynistic and harassing behavior during his 2017 run for governor, Murphy recently [announced Mollie Binotto will run his campaign](#) and a human resources firm has been hired to handle any personnel issues.

Culturupt, a South Orange firm, [will implement an HR program](#) that includes mandatory sexual harassment and bias trainings for Murphy campaign staff members and consultants.

Julie Roginsky, a Democratic political operative and a workgroup member, [publicly said Murphy's 2017 campaign](#) was “the [most toxic workplace environment](#) I have ever seen in 25 years of working on political campaigns.”

Murphy later [apologized to “those we failed”](#) during his successful 2017 campaign and promised that future campaigns “will lead the nation in progressive workforce policies and be a model of a respectful workplace.”

Weinberg, who announced Wednesday [she would not seek re-election when her term ends in January 2022](#), said she would remain the leader of the workgroup, and the group's work would continue.

“This is not a subject where we can say our work is done,” Weinberg said. “This group is going to stay together and monitor how these bills get into law and how they get implemented.”

Veteran lobbyist and workgroup member Jeannine LaRue said as she winds down her career, she feels “relieved” these discussions about sexual harassment were taking place and solutions are on the table.

“I just feel we are leaving behind a better landscape for young women who just want to do their jobs,” LaRue said. “All they want to do is do their jobs and persevere.”

In addition to Weinberg, Oliver and Roginsky, the members of the workgroup are: Alison Accettola, Senate Majority general counsel; Laurel Brennan, secretary-treasurer of the state AFL-CIO; Elizabeth Coulter, director of public health for the Planned Parenthood Action Fund of New Jersey; Sonia Delgado, a partner with the Princeton Public Affairs Group; Rosa Farias, deputy executive director of the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority; Jeannine LaRue, senior vice president of the Kaufman Zita Group; Sabeen Masih, vice president of public affairs

with the Capital Impact Group; Debbie Parks, international vice president of AFSCME; Crystal Pruitt, member of the Franklin Township Council; Lisa Randall, commissioner of the Bergen County Improvement Authority; Christine Shipley, executive director of the New Jersey Senate Minority Office; and Patricia Teffenhart, executive director of the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

Grace period for new lobbyist registry ends

The grace period for the new Yukon lobbyist registry has come to an end and those who seek to influence politicians will now need to report their efforts to a public database.

The new legislation — aimed at increasing government transparency — came into effect on Oct. 15. Lobbyists were then given a 90-day “grace period” in order to allow actors to “learn about the process and to adapt to the new reporting requirements.”

That grace period ended Jan. 13.

“The online registry will give all Yukoners the opportunity to learn about who is lobbying government, how they are lobbying, and why. Yukoners deserve to know who is communicating with government about important decisions that affect them directly,” said Premier Sandy Silver in the legislature when the new laws were announced.

“We’re very proud to offer this registry in Yukon, which is the first of its kind in the North and it’s a major step toward supporting greater transparency,” he said, referencing the fact that while all the provinces have a registry, this is the first among the three territories.

The Conflict of Interest Commissioner will oversee and monitor the registry.

Nine lobbyists had registered as of Jan. 12; four as consultants and five “in-house” lobbyists.

In-house lobbyists are members or employees of organizations and must register if they collectively lobby for 20 hours or more per year. Consultant lobbyists are hired by organizations and must register regardless of how much time they spend consulting in a year.

The registry is meant to allow Yukoners to see who is interacting with elected officials.

For example, Northwestel reported that it planned to lobby a number of MLAs from all three parties, including Premier Sandy Silver. It also listed deputy ministers of community services and highways and public works in addition to other departments listed generally.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reported seven interactions with politicians, including requests for Liberal MLAs to participate in online campaigns, a letter urging the premier to ask the federal government to “cancel or at least defer CPP premium increases” and a meeting with the Yukon Party.

In another entry, Ottawa-based lobbyist Glenn Priestley advocated on behalf of the Northern Air Transport Association about concerns the association has about the Workers Compensation Board Act and “requested lobbying for reasonable solutions that are in harmony with other territories and provinces.”

Priestley reported meeting or planning to meet with a number of members of the Liberal caucus over a three year period starting in 2020 until 2023.

Other lobbyists who have registered include StategyCorp Inc., Primerica Financial Services, Golfdale Consulting, Northern Vision Development LP, Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association Inc., and the Canadian Association of Direct Relationship Insurers.

Each lobbyist report must list the address of the organization, a project title, summary or details and the type of lobbying activity that was taken.

[Connecticut's \\$90M lobbying industry has a new player: former Speaker Joe Aresimowicz](#)

Following a well-trod path, former House Speaker Joe Aresimowicz is becoming a lobbyist, barred from lobbying his former colleagues for a year, but free to immediately seek business for his new employer, Gaffney Bennett & Associates.

Aresimowicz, a Democrat from Berlin who was a long-time employee of the public-sector union AFSCME Council 4, said Friday he is joining Gaffney Bennett, a firm with a deep base of business clients that makes it the state's largest lobbying entity.

After 16 years in the House and the last four as its top leader, Aresimowicz did not seek re-election last fall to the 30th District of Berlin and Southington, a district that had been growing increasingly hostile to Democrats. His term ended on Jan. 6.

At least three other former Connecticut speakers are now lobbyists: Thomas D. Ritter, Richard J. Balducci and James Amann. Speakers develop networks, nationally and in Connecticut, that can bring value to a lobbying firm beyond direct communication with lawmakers.

While barred from lobbying state government officials for a year by the state's revolving-door law, it is legal to be a rainmaker for a lobbying firm during this period. He also can lobby municipal and congressional officials.

Last month, Aresimowicz asked the Office of State Ethics for guidance on that issue, among others. He specifically asked whether he could seek business for a lobbying firm and share in the income brought by the new business.

"The answer is yes ... and the reason is this: you personally would not be communicating directly or soliciting others to communicate with any public official or his or her staff in the legislative or executive branch or in a quasi-public agency for the purpose of influencing any state legislative or administrative action," replied Brian J. O'Dowd, general counsel of the ethics office.

Since leaving the General Assembly 22 years ago, Tom Ritter has overseen a government relations practice at Brown Rudnick. In Connecticut, he has worked primarily as a behind-the-scenes strategist for clients, leaving direct lobbying in Hartford to others.

"I will say that I have looked to Speaker Ritter's success over the years, in many ways. And this particular decision was no exception," Aresimowicz said.

Tom Ritter is the father of Matt Ritter, who succeeded Aresimowicz as speaker.

Gaffney Bennett is the state's largest lobbying firm, as measured by clients and billings. It reported contracts worth \$10 million for the 2019-2020 state legislative term, more than double any other firm, according to filings with the Office of State Ethics.

Interest groups spent nearly \$90 million over the past two years on lobbying state government.

Gaffney's managing partner, Jay F. Malcynsky, is a Republican who advised Lowell P. Weicker Jr. during his time in the U.S. Senate and John G. Rowland, the former governor. A senior partner, Steve Kinney was an aide to Chris Dodd. Another partner, Fritz Conway, is an old friend of Aresimowicz.

"This is a long-term move for us. This is not a short-term move," Malcynsky said, though he added that Aresimowicz can help the firm immediately by meeting and strategizing with clients.

Aresimowicz said he knows the shift from union employee to a member of a business lobbying firm will be jarring to some. Gaffney's clients include one of labor's least favorite employers, Walmart. They have at least one labor client: the Operating Engineers.

Aresimowicz said he left the union for a variety of reasons, ranging from making way for a new generation of staff to the tensions his dual role as a House speaker and union employee had created at AFSCME.

"It was always in the back of my mind that at some point, I would move on," said Aresimowicz, who was an AFSCME employee for six years before he was elected to the House in 2004.

In December 2016, the Office of State Ethics advised him that nothing in the state ethics code barred him from continuing his job as education coordinator with AFSCME, once he became speaker of the House of Representatives.

As a speaker and an AFSCME employee, Aresimowicz faced suspicions he was acting on behalf of labor and complaints from unions when he supported budgets and legislation opposed by labor.

He broke with AFSCME and other unions in 2016, supporting an austerity budget that required layoffs of state employees. That led to sharp public criticism by Sal Luciano, his boss at AFSCME, and opposition by some AFSCME members to his endorsement by the AFL-CIO.

More recently, he earned the enmity of police unions by voting for the passage of a police accountability bill.

[Vanguard, BlackRock lag State Street on some proxy votes seeking political donation disclosures: new study](#)

Wall Street has slowly begun asking for [more disclosure of political donations](#) -- although not every big institutional investor [votes consistently for more transparency](#).

That's the conclusion of a new study by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Political Accountability, which found that many Wall Street investment firms voted for shareholder proposals surrounding political donations during the 2020 proxy voting season, which ended in June 2020.

But [Malvern-based Vanguard](#) and BlackRock have not been among them, according to the center's December study.

Of 69 large investment firms polled, 30 voted for political spending disclosure resolutions every time, while eight failed to support a single resolution. Forty of the 69 investors increased voting support for transparency from 2019 to 2020, while eight decreased voting support.

Since 2018, 31 of these investment fund firms increased their support for the political disclosure resolution while just nine decreased their support.

“The surge in support for disclosure reflects large investors’ recognition of the risks of political spending in today’s hyper-polarized environment, particularly in an election year,” said CPA president Bruce Freed.

“Investors understand this should be the norm for companies,” he added.

In light of last week’s insurrection on Capitol Hill, Corporate America and Wall Street firms including [Vanguard](#) and BlackRock paused political action committee donations to lawmakers. Blue chip companies have also severed ties with legislators who voted against President-elect Joe Biden’s victory.

Still, some Wall Street firms have moved more slowly than others in supporting CPA’s resolutions on political donations.

“Despite nearly all other large investors moving towards increasing support for election-related transparency, BlackRock and Vanguard have stayed on the sidelines when their enormous voting power could curb risk for shareholders while strengthening democracy,” Freed said.

In response, Vanguard spokeswoman Alyssa Thornton issued this statement: “As an investment manager, Vanguard stewards the assets of 30 million clients with a wide range of personal beliefs. Vanguard—and the Vanguard funds—do not hold or espouse particular political points of view. Through engagement with company boards Vanguard’s Investment Stewardship team encourages thorough and effective oversight of any political spending and lobbying activity, with careful consideration for alignment with stated business strategy and the long-term risks any activities may present. Proxy voting proposals regarding political spending are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, prioritizing the long-term financial materiality to a fund’s investors.”

As of the end of 2020, Vanguard said, it paused all political donations.

And last week, the \$6 trillion asset manager reiterated that “recent events in the U.S. political landscape have raised new questions about the potential risks associated with corporate political activity, and the Vanguard Funds will take that into consideration in our case-by-case analysis, in the same manner in which we integrate other market developments and new data,” the Vanguard spokeswoman said in the statement.

BlackRock and [Vanguard](#) do not retain ISS, Glass Lewis or other outside proxy advisors.

“We use a variety of resources to help inform our overall analysis. Importantly, we do not vote in lockstep with recommendations from proxy advisors, the Vanguard spokesperson said.

Smaller firms like Philadelphia-based Friends Fiduciary Corp. have long supported shareholder resolutions regarding transparency in corporate political contributions.

“We urge laggards like Vanguard to reconsider their votes against oversight and disclosure, particularly because the reputational risks to companies have become even more clear with a number of politicians either directly or indirectly fomenting division resulting in the riots at the Capitol,” said Kate Monahan, shareholder engagement manager at the Quaker-affiliated Friends Fiduciary.

Money & Politics

Lobbying and political spending resolutions typically call on public companies to enhance disclosures of political expenditures on elections and lobbying, including payments to lobbyists at the state and federal levels, payments to trade associations used for lobbying, and payments for grassroots activities aimed at influencing policymakers.

While companies are required to disclose direct federal lobbying expenditures, state disclosure policies vary widely and companies often use trade associations to influence public policy indirectly. Membership in and payments to these trade associations can be a significant contradiction between a company’s behavior and its goals, according to [Majority Action think tank](#).

BlackRock disputed the center’s conclusions, claiming it has forward-looking goals for more transparency.

In the firm’s [2021 Stewardship Expectations](#), BlackRock said it will now “seek confirmation from companies, through engagement or disclosure, that their corporate political activities are consistent with their public statements on material and strategic policy issues. Moreover, we

expect companies to monitor the positions taken by trade associations of which they are active members on such issues for consistency on major policy positions and to provide an explanation where inconsistencies exist.”

In the report, BlackRock said it asked for “enhanced disclosure of political activities, including at Cintas and Origin, two public companies.

CPA worked with Proxy Insight to examine the 69 investors’ votes across the 2018-2020 proxy seasons.

The 69 investors identified were those in the Proxy Insight database that cast votes on at least five CPA model-resolutions in each of the last three proxy seasons and were among the 100 largest investors by global assets under management.

Other notable findings: In 2019, only 14 of the 69 investors supported 100% of shareholder resolutions; in 2020, that number rose to 30 investors.

Only eight investors failed to support a single political spending disclosure resolution in 2020 compared with 13 groups in 2019 and 12 in 2018.

A full copy of the study is on CPA’s website:

politicalaccountability.net/reports/cpa-reports.

[End of Trump term fuels pardon-lobbying market](#)

As President Donald Trump prepares to leave office in days, a lucrative market for pardons is coming to a head, with some of his allies collecting fees from wealthy felons or their associates to push the White House for clemency, according to documents and interviews with more than three dozen lobbyists and lawyers.

The lobbying for pardons heated up as it became clear that Trump had no recourse for challenging his election defeat, lobbyists and lawyers say. One lobbyist, Brett Tolman, a former federal prosecutor who has been advising the White House on pardons and commutations, has monetized his clemency work. He has collected tens of thousands of dollars, and possibly more, in recent weeks to lobby the White House for clemency for former Arkansas Sen. Jeremy Hutchinson; the founder of the notorious online drug marketplace Silk Road; and a New York City socialite who pleaded guilty in a fraud scheme.

Trump's former personal lawyer, John Dowd, has marketed himself to felons as someone who could secure pardons because of his close relationship with the president, accepting tens of thousands of dollars from a wealthy felon and advising him and other potential clients to leverage Trump's grievances about the justice system.

A onetime top adviser to the Trump campaign was paid \$50,000 to help seek a pardon for John Kiriakou, a former CIA officer convicted of illegally disclosing classified information, and agreed to a \$50,000 bonus if the president granted it, according to a copy of an agreement.

And Kiriakou was said to have separately been told that Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, could help him secure a pardon for \$2 million. Kiriakou rejected the offer, but an associate, fearing that Giuliani was illegally selling pardons, alerted the FBI, sources said. Giuliani challenged this characterization.

After Trump's impeachment following the deadly riot at the Capitol, the pardon power remains one of the last outlets for quick unilateral action by the president. Sources say he has suggested to aides that he wants to take the unprecedented step of pardoning himself, although it was not clear whether he had broached the topic since the assault on the Capitol.

He is also said to have discussed issuing preemptive pardons to his children; his son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner; and Giuliani.

A White House spokesman declined to comment.

There are few historical parallels to the current wave of pardon lobbying. Perhaps the closest occurred in the final hours of Bill Clinton's administration when he issued 170 pardons and commutations, some of which went to people who paid six-figure sums to his family and associates. But even Clinton, who was seen as flouting protocols, mostly rewarded people who had gone through an intensive Justice Department review process intended to identify and vet the most deserving recipients from among thousands of clemency applications.

Trump has shunned that process more than any recent president, creating an ad hoc system in the White House that Kushner has had significant influence over, and has relied on input from an informal network of outside advisers, including Tolman.

Few regulations or disclosure requirements govern presidential clemency grants or lobbying for them, particularly by lawyers, and there is nothing illegal about Trump associates being paid to lobby for clemency. Any explicit offers of payment to the president in return could be

investigated as possible violations of bribery laws, but no evidence has emerged that Trump was offered money in exchange for a pardon.

Some who used resources or connections to try to get to Trump say clemency should be granted to more people, independent of their clout.

"The criminal justice system is badly broken, badly flawed," said Tim Hutchinson of Arkansas, a Republican who served in Congress from 1993 to 2003.

He has paid Tolman at least \$10,000 since late last year to lobby the White House and Congress for a pardon for his son Jeremy Hutchinson, who pleaded guilty in 2019 to accepting bribes and to tax fraud, according to a lobbying disclosure filed this month.

Tim Hutchinson said the \$10,000 was only for lobbying, and he acknowledged that Tolman may have performed legal services not reflected in the disclosure. While Hutchinson said he was happy with Tolman, he added, "There is a lot of people deserving of mercy, and I hope the president has a wide net in his approach to pardons and clemency."

Clemency Advocate

Tolman, who did not respond to requests for comment, is a former U.S. attorney in Utah appointed by President George W. Bush. He was a leading supporter of legislation overhauling sentencing laws, which was championed by Trump and Kushner, and was invited to the White House signing ceremony in December 2018.

Since then, Tolman has emerged as a prominent advocate for clemency requests, with his firm's website highlighting a White House statement crediting him with helping secure pardons or commutations for three people, including Kushner's father, a wealthy real estate developer who was convicted of tax evasion, witness tampering and campaign finance violations.

The White House has also credited Tolman with helping less well-connected offenders win clemency. There are no public records indicating Tolman was paid for those efforts, and Tolman wrote on Twitter on Friday that he has "represented many to get clemency. Some have been paying clients, many have been pro bono. I'm proud of my team's clemency work."

He filed paperwork this month indicating he was paid \$20,000 in the last three months of last year to seek a commutation for Dina Wein Reis, who pleaded guilty in 2011 to conspiracy to commit wire fraud. Reis, who was released from prison in 2014, did not respond to requests for comment.

A filing this month revealed that Tolman was paid \$22,500 by an Arizona man named Brian Anderson who had retained him in September to seek clemency for Ross Ulbricht, the Silk Road founder. Ulbricht was sentenced to life in prison in 2015 for engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise and distributing narcotics on the internet.

Access to President

Weeks after stepping down as the president's lawyer in 2018, Dowd began marketing himself as a potential conduit for pardons. Dowd told prospective clients that he could help them receive pardons because of his access to Trump and top aides such as Kushner.

Dowd, who according to people with knowledge of the discussions had, as the president's lawyer, dangled a pardon to stop Trump's former national security adviser from cooperating with investigators, had continued to informally advise Trump. After leaving the Trump legal team, Dowd began representing William Walters, a wealthy sports gambler in Las Vegas convicted of insider trading. Walters paid Dowd tens of thousands of dollars, but a pardon has yet to materialize.

Dowd declined to answer questions.

The former Trump campaign adviser, Karen Giorno, also had access to people around the president, having run Trump's campaign in Florida during the 2016 primary and remaining on board as a senior policy adviser during the general election.

She met in 2018 with Kiriakou, who pleaded guilty in 2012 to illegally disclosing the name of a CIA officer involved in the waterboarding of an American detainee. Although the name was never publicly disclosed, Kiriakou was sentenced to 30 months in prison. In the meeting, at the Washington office of his lawyer, Kiriakou said he had been wronged by the government and was seeking a pardon so he could carry a handgun and receive his pension.

Giorno was accompanied by Trump's former director of advance, George Gigicos. Both said they had direct lines to the president, Kiriakou said.

"I wanted to believe them," he said.

Giorno disputed this account, saying neither she nor Gigicos bragged about their presidential access. She said Gigicos was not involved in her effort, which she said was motivated by a feeling that "it was unfair what happened" to Kiriakou.

In July 2018, Giorno signed an agreement with Kiriakou, a copy of which was obtained by The New York Times, "to seek a full pardon from President Donald Trump of his conviction" for \$50,000. The agreement promised another \$50,000 as a bonus if she secured a pardon.

Giorno said she was approached about working on the matter by Kiriakou's lawyer. She said she never spoke to Trump directly about Kiriakou and did not lobby anyone in his administration for a pardon. Rather, she said that in meetings with senior administration officials, she tried "to connect the dots" between the people and techniques involved in Kiriakou's prosecution and those involved in the special counsel investigation that was then dogging Trump's presidency.

Banned from the Capitol, Alaska lobbyists contend with pandemic predicament

The Alaska Legislature opened its session Tuesday amid a deadly pandemic and a huge budget shortfall.

But if you think lawmakers' job is tough, consider, for a moment, the plight of the lobbyist. They're paid for access to and intelligence on what's happening in the Capitol — but for now, they're banned from the building.

They're also contending with a disorganized power structure. It's been more than two months since the election, but [the state Senate only formed a ruling majority on Tuesday](#). The House still has no one in charge.

Lobbyists say the power vacuum and their loss of in-person access to the Capitol will be an undeniable obstacle as they seek to influence policy and provide lawmakers information from businesses, local governments, organized labor and other interests.

But they plan to make do with Zoom meetings, text messages, and even socially distant office rearrangements they hope could entice lawmakers into taking meetings outside the Capitol.

"It's more difficult to build a relationship over the telephone or on a Zoom call," said Wendy Chamberlain, a veteran Juneau lobbyist with clients in health care, seafood and municipal government. "But we still feel confident."

Chamberlain's lobbying firm has an office next door to the Capitol, in the basement of health food store Rainbow Foods. It has a conference room is big enough for socially distanced meetings, she said, if lawmakers are comfortable paying an in-person visit. Otherwise, she'll communicate by phone, email and Zoom.

Alaska lawmakers and staff are being subjected to regular COVID-19 testing as a condition of entering the Capitol. But the public — lobbyists included — is barred from the building.

Kodiak Republican Sen. Gary Stevens, who runs the committee charged with setting legislative rules, said some lobbyists pushed for an exemption, perhaps by paying for their own testing, but lawmakers declined to grant one.

“They have a job to do, and they have clients,” Stevens said in a phone interview. “But we just thought that we should not be allowing lobbyists in the building if we don’t allow the general public in the building.”

Those rules are forcing lobbyists to find other ways to connect with legislators.

Down the street from the Capitol, Frank Bickford, whose clients include Wal-Mart, Verizon and the Dimond Center, is working behind a desk with a recently-installed plexiglass shield, which he said will also allow him to meet with lawmakers and their aides in his own space.

“With the mask and the plexiglass and the sanitizer stuff, I think we’re good,” he said. “I don’t want to have more than two people in the office at a time, that’s for sure.”

Other lobbyists, including veteran John Bitney, have office space in a building across the street from the Capitol where lawmakers and aides are getting their COVID-19 tests — a point that Juneau Democratic Sen. Jesse Kiehl noted in a tweet earlier this month.

Bitney’s office is directly adjacent to the testing site, which makes him “the best-positioned lobbyist” in the Legislature this year, Kiehl quipped.

“Every legislator and staffer will come to him every three to four days this session,” Kiehl said, adding: “Downside for John Bitney: 100% of us will be tetchy because someone is about to stick a swab up our noses.”

For many lobbyists, in-person interactions are crucial — grabbing a quick face-to-face chat with an aide on their way out of an office, or picking up on a legislator’s grimace or sigh in a committee hearing. Getting a lawmaker’s attention by text can also be more challenging than stopping them in a hallway.

“I hope they’ll be reading my texts,” quipped Jordan Marshall, who lobbies for tribal health groups, cities and boroughs.

Unlike some of his colleagues, Marshall said his style is less reliant on informal interaction: He tries to keep his exchanges with legislators precise and specific.

He said the lack of Capitol access is an undeniable loss, but he also pointed out the Alaska Legislature has good technologies that allow electronic engagement. For now, he’ll be sticking to socially distant forms of communication, he added.

“As much as I’d like to continue business as normal, I think until it’s my turn to get vaccinated, and until the vast majority of folks who want a vaccination can get one, it just feels uncomfortable to me to try to create face-to-face opportunities,” he said.

One particularly acute challenge, lobbyists say, has been forming relationships with newly elected lawmakers amid a pandemic. Typically, Chamberlain said, she would introduce herself to all the freshmen, maybe hand out business cards or meet for coffee, and “pretty soon, by a month-and-a-half, you know one another.”

“That’s not there this year,” she said.

Calvin Schrage is a newly elected independent representative from the Anchorage Hillside. He said he’s ducked lobbyists’ invitations for coffee because he lives with Fairbanks Democratic Rep. Grier Hopkins, whose wife is pregnant.

Instead, Schrage said he’s taking meetings over Zoom and other online platforms.

“It’s a little different,” Schrage said. “But at the same time, we are still finding ways to get in touch, to have those conversations. They’ve been productive despite being online — just, maybe not as friendly and personable as they might be in person.”

Another consideration for lobbyists is whether they want to take the risk of meeting with state legislators who have resisted pandemic precautions like mask-wearing, among them Eagle River Republican Sen. Lora Reinbold.

On top of all that, there’s the fact that, until Tuesday morning, neither the House nor Senate had been able to organize into ruling caucuses.

That meant lobbyists still didn't know who would be in charge of committees or handling specific bills. While the Senate announced the formation of a Republican majority Tuesday morning, the state House remains divided.

"There's so much uncertainty," Marshall said.

Heidi Drygas, a former state labor commissioner who lobbies for organized labor groups, said she's trying to set realistic expectations for the year, knowing the pandemic isn't going to leave the Legislature with a lot of room for anything but the basics.

"I don't hear anyone who says, 'I think we're going to get a lot done this session,'" Drygas said. "Nobody is trying to tackle big, lofty legislation before they gavel out."